

No.2

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ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S HOCKEY TEAM

OR THE RIVAL ATHLETES
OF OLD CRANFORD



BY MAURICE STEVENS

"Look alive, there, fellows, and form a line, a living rope! Courage! Hold fast and we'll have you out in a jiffy!" cried Jack, reaching his stick over to his rival.

Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throngs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

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Jack Lightfoot's Hockey Team

OR,

THE RIVAL ATHLETES OF OLD CRANFORD.

A Rattling Story of Winter Pastimes.

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when his wandering spirit took him abroad into strange lands.

Ned Skeen, of impulsive, nervous temperament, one of those who followed the newcomer, Birkett, being dazzled by the dash of his manner, and the free way in which he flung money around.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a staunch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Prof. Sanderson, the autocrat of the Academy, who seemed to have long been Jack's evil genius, and who took pleasure in nursing some grudge against young Lightfoot.

Jerry Mulligan, a broth of an Irish boy, fond of fair play.

Kate Strawn and **Nellie Conner**, some of the girls at Cranford.

Mrs. Lightfoot, Jack's mother, whose husband went to parts unknown years back.

Phil Kirtland, captain of the Academy Hockey Team, and a crack player.

Bob Brewster, a brawny lad, against whom Kimball tried his Jap tricks with poor results.

Kimball, a slight chap, who had been reading and practicing *ju jitsu*, or the Japanese method of self-defense, and who was always ready to entertain his comrades with wonderful exhibitions of the science.

Mr. Snodgrass, an elderly gentleman of means, who took great interest in young Jack.

CHAPTER I.

FUN ON THE ICE.

"Oh, we won't go home till morning!" sang a voice.

"If you don't look out you'll go home mighty quick, on a stretcher!"

"Hello, that you, Skeeny? I didn't mean to bump into you, and—oh, Jiminy Crickets, there goes my plug hat, and a fellow has stuck his skate through it!"

Leaving Ned Skeen, whom he had run into accidentally, Lafe Lampton skated after the boy who had not only stuck his skate through the crown of the hat, but was skating off with it, wearing it like a black collar round his leg above the ankle.

"Hi, there!" shouted Lafe, forgetting his constitu-

tional desire to move slowly, a thing which made the boys call him "Loaf" quite as often as Lafe, and skating hurriedly after the offender, "I'd have you know that nice, new, silk tile isn't an anklet!"

A carnival of fun was being held on Cranford Lake.

The time was night, but strings of Chinese lanterns, together with leaping bonfires on shore, made everything almost as light as day, except beyond the reach of this illumination, where the shadows seemed all the blacker because of it.

Old Snodgrass, as everyone called the queer, old capitalist and banker, had given Cranford a surprise, and this was the result.

Jack Lightfoot had greatly pleased Snodgrass by winning the sharply contested ice-yacht race against Ben Birkett, which all the town had come out to witness, and in addition had been largely instrumental in showing young Birkett up in his true light, as a scamp and a scapegrace.

Snodgrass had never liked Birkett, because, as now appeared, Birkett had been insufferably offensive to him, when, on a certain occasion, Snodgrass had refused to loan him money.

Snodgrass' surprise was an illumination of the lake on the Cranford side, with bonfires on shore, and a masquerade of skaters on the ice.

The song of the ringing steel made sweet music for the young people who were so fond of winter sports.

Everywhere masked skaters were gliding and whirling, cutting eccentric circles, and writing their initials with their skates, for their friends to guess who they were.

Not a face was uncovered, and it was only by the voice that the identity of anyone could be known.

And such costumes! They were mostly home-made and hastily evolved, though some had been hired from the nearby city.

Country women, city men, peasant girls, farmers, clowns, knights, Japanese soldiers, Yankee sailors, and

many other characters appeared, skimming the glassy surface, singing, laughing and cracking jokes.

Neither Lafe Lampton nor Ned Skeen would have known the other, if they had not collided and then spoken.

Ned, who was a rather slim young chap, wore a grotesque false face, and had padded his stomach until he was almost as round as a ball. He was supposed to represent a fat clown.

Lampton, on the other hand, appeared as a dude, with silk hat, and dudish clothing, and wore a fine silk mask, showing a tiny waxed mustache and an eyeglass.

He recovered his ruined hat after a chase, and came skating back with the battered and torn tile on his head.

"Oh, we won't go home till morning," he sang again; "we won't go home till morning; we won't go home till morning—and then we'll come back soon!"

A sailor boy came by, wabbling awkwardly.

"If I could only keep these skates on an even keel I'd be all right!" he declared.

"Hello, old man, you gave yourself away that time!" cried Lampton, gliding up to him.

The pretended sailor laughed.

"That so, Lafe?" he said, in the unmistakable voice of Jack Lightfoot. "Well, you gave yourself away in speaking to me. Steady me, won't you, or I'll flop."

Though there was not a better skater that night on Cranford Lake, Jack, in his costume of sailor boy, slipped as though about to shoot wildly along the ice, and, throwing out his hands, caught Lafe Lampton's arm.

"Avast, there!" cried Lafe, good-humoredly. "Reef your jib boom, or you'll be into me!"

"This is great," said Jack, in a low tone, as he clung to the pretended dude. "See the lights, and the crowd; and hear the people laugh and shout."

"And look at the pretty girls!" remarked the dude,

twirling his waxed mustache and swinging his cane
 "I tell you, old Snod is hot stuff!"

They skated on together, arm in arm, the sailor
 wabbling and rolling, and both singing lustily, in voices
 which they attempted to disguise:

"Let others praise warm, sunny days
 And air perfumed with roses,
 And loud complain of wintry rain,
 Cold days and frozen noses;
 We'll sing a song, if right or wrong,
 Of winter's hearty pleasures;
 Of skating nights and wild delights,
 And glittering icy treasures."

Jack Lightfoot had a beautiful tenor voice, and Lafe
 Lampton's bass was not at all bad.

Ned Skeen came skating after them, howling in de-
 cision:

"And when we frost our little ears,
 And chill our little toes-es,
 And eye-cicles hang from our eyes,
 And we freeze inside our clothes-es,
 We'll still sing on, if right or wrong,
 And——"

Whack!

Ned Skeen went down on his padded stomach, and
 slid along the ice.

He had been struck by Tom Lightfoot, in the guise
 of a Japanese soldier.

It was another accident, due to the fact that Tom
 was trying rather hurriedly to get out of the reach of
 some laughing girls, who were chasing him to dis-
 cover who he was.

"Beg pardon," said Tom, "I thought you were a
 Russian."

"He was a Rushin' for a little while," remarked
 Jack Lightfoot, with a laugh.

"Oh, I know you, anyway!" shouted a girlish voice.

"And I'll know who you are, Kate Strawn, if you
 speak that way too often!" Jack retorted.

Kate, dressed as a peasant girl, with short skirts
 and a jaunty cap, and a black half-mask, skated up to
 Jack and Lafe.

"Who was that Japanese soldier?" she demanded.
 "I thought at first he was Tom."

Tom Lightfoot had skated on, chased by some other

girls who were anxious to solve the mystery of the
 young Jap, who had shown himself to be a clever
 skater.

"You'll have to ask him. I can't be expected to
 give away secrets."

"He was a chump!" cried Ned Skeen, rolling from
 his padded stomach and climbing to his feet. "If he
 can't skate, why don't he keep off the ice?"

"You can skate all right, Mr. Skeen," said the
 merry girl, "and you don't even have to use your
 skates! But I think you must be awfully tired!"

Ned Skeen always declared that he "hated" girls.

"Why tired?" he asked, almost angrily.

"You seem to want to lie down so much!"

Then Kate Strawn fled on in the direction taken by
 Tom Lightfoot.

"The trouble with these skates is that they're not
 mates," said Jack, as he went on, slipping, and sliding,
 and clinging to the arm of the cane-swinging dude.
 "They want to part company all the time."

Lafe Lampton laughed.

"Sometimes you make me think——"

"Oh, that's good; then I haven't lived in vain! You
 really do think, occasionally?"

"Take a reef in your tongue," said Lafe. "Jiminy
 Crickets, I'm hungry for an apple! I didn't bring any,
 for I was afraid they'd give me away."

"Perhaps you were afraid you'd have to give them
 away!"

"Oh, come now!" said Lafe.

"I'm coming; if you'll give me a little help I think
 I can steer these things all right.

They skated on again, singing together:

"Oh, ye who love the glowing fire
 And pine for summer weather,
 Come out to-night while all is bright,
 And we will skate together.
 Then ne'er again will you complain
 Or sigh when autumn closes,
 Nor sing 'The Good Old Summertime,'
 Nor pine for summer roses."

As they swung in toward the shore, where the bonfires flamed and the crowd was thickest, they beheld Jerry Mulligan, the young Irish cart driver, who was Jack Lightfoot's warm admirer and friend.

Jerry had a clumsy pair of skates on his feet, and a heavy hod on his shoulders.

"Whurroo!" he cried. "Nobody knows me—I don't think!"

He removed his new, white T D pipe from his mouth to say this.

He stared hard at Jack, then came toward him.

"Would yees know who I am, in me new disguise?"

The fun of it was, that Jerry was not disguised at all.

"Nobody iver looked an me carryin' a hod befure, an' they can't guess who I am. I'm Misther Dooley. An' I think I see befure me Little B'y Blue. An' who is the jude, bedad?"

Coming still closer, he stooped, holding his pipe in one hand and balancing his hod with the other.

"Little B'y Blue, which yer name is Jack, Misther Shnodgrass towld me to say to ye, whin I met ye, that by an' by he wants to see ye. He'll be wanderin' round here nixt the shore all avenin'."

"You know me?" said Jack, in surprise.

"Misther Shnodgrass towld me you was a sailor b'y, an' I guessed the rist av it. He's out there now."

Jerry skated heavily on, smoking his pipe and carrying his hod, and he made an odd spectacle, in the midst of those masquerading figures.

Jack Lightfoot and Lafe Lampton skated to the shore, where they looked about for Mr. Snodgrass, but didn't find him.

"It may have been a joke on the part of Jerry," said Jack.

"Yes, that's so; let's get back into the swim.

"Oh, we're fishes, little fishes,
Down underneath the sea;
The mermaids wash the dishes,
And ask us in to tea.
They comb their hair with clam shells,
And are happy as can be,
When we swim in, and shake a fin,
Down underneath the sea."

They "swam in," singing, through the thick of the crowd, the sailor clinging to the arm of the dude, and the dude swinging his cane.

CHAPTER II.

A MEETING AND A CHALLENGE.

While Jack Lightfoot and Lafe Lampton skated on, singing in a rollicking way and feeling that they were having the time of their lives, they by and by encountered Prof. Sanderson and Phil Kirtland.

Jack tried to avoid them, and the professor seemed willing that he should.

Sanderson was not disguised in any way. Kirtland was masquerading as an English soldier, and his red uniform had almost a bloody hue under the light of the Chinese lanterns.

There was no good feeling between Prof. Sanderson and Jack Lightfoot. The professor was the proprietor and principal of the Cranford Academy, a swell private school, to which Jack had tried to gain admission. He had been turned down, because his marks were too low, Sanderson said, but for private reasons, as Jack well knew.

This enmity between Jack and the professor reached back of this time, beginning with some trouble which Jack's father had with Sanderson. Jack's father was gone, and the professor had revenged himself so far as he could on the son.

Phil Kirtland was one of Sanderson's pupils.

He was a tall, good-looking boy, with dark hair and eyes, and had a great reputation as an all-round athlete, skater and master of almost every form of juvenile sports.

Jack Lightfoot was as fond of boyish sports and athletics as Kirtland, though his opportunities for acquiring skill in them had not been so good, as he had not the leisure Kirtland enjoyed.

But lately, since the growing rivalry and almost enmity between the schools had begun to manifest itself rather strongly, it was known that Jack Lightfoot had got together a number of the high-school boys, and was doing what he could to put them, and himself as well, in trim for meeting some of the academy athletic teams.

"Hello," said Kirtland, turning toward Jack and Lafe, "I know you fellows, I guess! That's Lightfoot, isn't it?"

Jack stopped, clinging with a wabbling motion to the arm of the pretended dude.

"I know you, all right," said Lafe. "Your question, and the way you said it, spoke louder than your uniform."

"I wasn't talking to you!"

"Oh, come away!" said Prof. Sanderson. "What is it you want to do?"

Kirtland skated closer.

"Lightfoot," he said, "I hear you dream you can skate!"

"I might, if I could keep these things steady under me."

"Perhaps you dream that *you* can skate!" said Lafe."

"Well, thank you, Lafayette, I can skate a few, if that's what you mean."

He waved his hand airily.

"But I'm talking to Lightfoot."

Jack did not attempt to conceal his identity further.

"I'm curious to know who told you how I was disguised to-night?" he said, with the utmost good humor."

"Lightfoot, I'll enlighten you; my informant was Miss Kate Strawn."

"I'm not boasting of my skating ability," said Jack,

feeling somewhat unpleasant, though Kirtland meant his tone to be humorous, if his words were not.

"I got your challenge," said Kirtland, "and——"

"Got my challenge?"

"Sure thing, Lightfoot."

"I sent you no challenge."

"Oh, yes, you did; Ned Skeen brought it. He said that the hockey team you've picked up down at the high school could thump the packing out of the one we have up at the academy, and you wanted me to know it. I'm giving you the challenge, words and all, as it came to me. Skeen said it was intended as a challenge."

Jack Lightfoot laughed.

"Kirtland, Skeen simply worked that up himself, out of a remark he heard me make."

"You didn't really mean it as a challenge, then?"

"Not at all. I was talking to the fellows who compose our team. After they had done some fine work, as I thought, I told them I believed we could put it over your team; and we could, if we could play that way all the time."

"Oh! If you could play that way all the time? Skeen didn't report it in that manner at all."

"Skeen was simply bragging," said Jack.

"And you were?" echoed Kirtland.

"I didn't mean it as bragging."

"Well, it made me hot," Kirtland declared.

"You thought we fellows might beat you, I suppose?" said Lafe, speaking slowly.

"Beat—wow! that's a good one; why you fellows couldn't beat a drum!"

"I guess I'd better hurry to a doctor!" said Lafe, putting his hand on his stomach.

Kirtland looked at him.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"You make me sick!"

Kirtland stared; then straightened up, and again wiggled his hand airily.

"Don't aim to be a second Mark Twain, Lafayette,

for you can't, and when you try you simply make yourself ridiculous."

"If Jack *had* sent that challenge, what then?" Lafe demanded.

"What then?" Kirtland snapped his fingers. "I should have laughed at it, that's all. There wouldn't be any honor in playing against you. To win from you would be like stealing money from a blind cripple."

Jack Lightfoot released the arm of his friend.

He was becoming irritated.

"Kirtland," he said, "I did intend to send a challenge to your team before the season ended, but not now, as we wanted to get more practice first. You've been longer organized, have had more opportunities, and, of course, ought to be able to put up a stronger game. But I *will* challenge you, and right now! My team, that you think you can sneer at, will play your team, whenever you are ready."

Prof. Sanderson laughed.

"Jack seems to be quite willing to challenge, since you have said you wouldn't play his team!" he sneered.

Jack Lightfoot's heart burned with a sudden fire.

But he turned calmly to Kirtland.

"What do you say?"

"Lightfoot, your cheek only equals your limited ability."

"You won't accept a challenge?"

"Go out and get a reputation," said Kirtland, loftily; "pick out a crowd of street boys, and see if you can beat them first. Why, you fellows can't play hockey! You wouldn't know an ice puck if you should see one."

"That's right," said Jack. "Lafe found one the other day and tried to eat it, thinking it was a cake of chocolate."

"And don't send any more of your boasting messages up to the academy!" cried Kirtland.

"I didn't send that message. Skeen had no authority to speak for me, or the team."

Lafe glared at Kirtland.

"Say, Kirtland," he said, speaking slowly, "are you reading the 'Health Hints' in the *Cranford Item*?"

The *Item* was Cranford's newspaper.

"What do you mean?" asked Kirtland.

"Well, there was one this week that you ought to use—it told how to take out a swelling in the head!"

"Ah! Lafayette, don't work your funny bone too hard, or you might crack it!"

"You won't accept the challenge, then?" Jack asked.

"Get a reputation!" said Kirtland. "Does the academy hockey team have to meet any crowd of kids that comes along? Go shake yourself!"

He moved on with Prof. Sanderson.

"I'll send them a challenge by and by which they can't turn down," said Jack, feeling indignant. "I'll word it in such a way that they'll have to accept it."

"If you do, and they accept, we'll play for blood. I'd like to go up against those chaps and try to take them down a little."

To their surprise they saw Kirtland returning with Sanderson.

Sanderson was the cause of this return.

A narrow-minded man, holding a smothered feeling of hate and contempt for young Lightfoot, he thought Kirtland was passing by an opportunity to humiliate Jack.

To the professor's mind, Jack Lightfoot had in the past week received altogether too much praise and attention from the people of Cranford.

It irritated and angered him, yet he had been in a position where he could say nothing, and had even been forced to listen in silence to words of commendation concerning young Lightfoot.

Ben Birkett, who had proven to be such a rascal and who had been so signally defeated by Jack, had been not only one of Prof. Sanderson's students, but his friend and intimate.

Hence, Sanderson said a few words to Phil Kirtland,

and together they turned back after they had skated but a short distance.

"Lightfoot," said Kirtland, as he now came up, "perhaps I'm a fool for lowering the dignity of my team, but I'll accept that challenge you were bold enough to give a while ago; my team will play yours, when and where you like."

"Make it Saturday afternoon," said Jack, "and right here on the lake."

"Good enough!" cried Lafe, swinging his cane like a hockey stick. "Biff—goal! I see me beating you, Kirtland, right now."

"Lafayette, my boy, I'm not directing my valuable remarks to you," said Kirtland, airily. "Did you think I was?"

"When the wind blows, I can't help hearing it; your words reached me!"

"Saturday afternoon," said Jack, "and on the lake. That gives your team the advantage, but we'll meet you then just the same."

"Gives my team the advantage?"

"Yes, your fellows have already had enough practice to get into good shape; but we'll meet you just the same."

"I suppose," said Sanderson, unable to keep from chipping in, "you say that, Mr. Lightfoot, just to let your team down easily, when it's defeated!"

"It's a disgrace to meet them at all," said Kirtland, "but we'll do it. If you are really afraid, though, Lightfoot, we'll put it off, just to accommodate you, so that you can get into good form, you know!"

Again, though he affected a humorous tone, his words and manner were not pleasant.

"We might have a snow, or the ice may not be so good if we delay," said Jack. "We'll have it early."

"And, Kirtland," said Lafe, swinging his cane again, "there isn't any doubt but that we'll be easy boys to do up. Biff—bang—goal! When the muster roll is calling, we'll be there—and don't you forget it."

CHAPTER III.

JACK'S WEAKNESS.

Having given the challenge, and the challenge having been accepted, Jack Lightfoot began to consider the thing more seriously, as he and Lampton skated on.

He had not intended to offer his challenge for some time; but had meant to wait, and drill his team meanwhile, so that if the academy boys agreed to a match the high-school students could enter it with more hope of victory.

He knew that his material, though the best to be had in the high school at that time, was very uneven in quality.

He had a few good players, but others who were very poor.

As he thought of some of the awkward practice work, some of the lazy dribbling of the puck, and some of the errors that even his best men had made, he feared that perhaps he had been hasty in what he had done that night.

He began to feel that he ought to have asked for and demanded more time.

He had acted under a sense of irritation that was almost anger.

Always, when he did that, there was a reaction in his feelings and a slumping of his confidence.

A lack of confidence in his own ability was one of the things that Jack Lightfoot had discovered as a weakness in his character, and against which he had determined to fight most desperately.

But this did not seem to him now so much a lack of confidence as a weighing of the chances and discovering that they were not good.

He spoke of his thoughts to Lafe Lampton.

"Take a brace!" said Lafe. "If we can't do those fellows we'll give 'em the game of their lives."

"But our team work is ragged."

"So is theirs. I've watched their play."

"You think we can defeat them?"

"I don't know; they're good players, and they've had the most practice. But we can try. I never lie down in a thing of this kind until I'm knocked down. Take a brace."

"I will!" said Jack.

He knew it was what he needed.

"You were troubled this way before the ice-yacht race," said Lafe, "yet you sailed to win, and you won!"

"It was a narrow squeak. We didn't have much to spare."

"It wasn't a mile, but it was enough; you won, that's the thing."

"Yes, we won!"

"You won; I only helped!"

For a long time they skated around, far out on the lake, beyond the crowd and beyond the lights, talking over this matter.

"A fellow would think I'm the captain, instead of you," said Lafe, rather impatiently. "I don't know whether we can win or not, but we can try."

Jack Lightfoot was silenced.

Lafe Lampton was right, and he knew it. The encouragement, the spirit of fight which makes for victory, should come from the captain to the men, and not from the men to the captain.

"We'll win it; we've got to win it!"

"That's the stuff," said Lafe; "now you're talking. If we believe we've got more than a fighting chance, and I'm dead sure we have, and then play to win, we'll crowd those fellows mighty hard. And if we're defeated, we won't be whitewashed. They're not invincible just because they're from the academy."

"That's right. We'll play them for all that's in us; and I really think if we do we can beat them."

They skated toward the shore.

The hour was growing late.

Though the bonfires still flamed and the lanterns glowed, most of the people had gone to their homes.

Jack had forgotten that Mr. Snodgrass desired to see him, and now recalled it with a sudden feeling of confusion.

"Gee! I'd forgot all about that, too!" said Lafe. "Perhaps he hasn't gone home. We'll see!"

They skated more rapidly, and soon approached the shore.

As they did so they saw Snodgrass walking toward them across the ice.

He was not far from the point where red lights and boards marked the break in the ice made at the conclusion of the ice-yacht race.

He came up to the two boys, when he observed the sailor suit of blue.

"Ah! Jack, that you?" he called.

"Yes, sir," Jack answered, touching his sailor cap.

Snodgrass laughed. He was a grizzled man, of stern aspect, and had anything but a reputation as a humorist.

"You're no true sailor, Jack; you should say, 'ay, ay, sir!'"

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried Jack, again touching his cap.

"I'm in a big hurry, Jack. I intended to see you about another matter altogether; but it's too late for that now. A carriage has come for me, and I must catch that train, due at the station right now. So I haven't time to go up to my house."

He put his hand in the inner pocket of his overcoat and drew out a package.

Skates ground behind Jack, and, half turning, he saw Kirtland's red uniform.

"Hello, Kirtland; another challenge?" said Lafe.

Snodgrass was speaking to Jack.

"There's a thousand dollars in bills in this package, Jack; and you're to take them straight to my wife, and give them to her."

Some one called to Lafe Lampton at this moment, and he glided away.

"Yes," said Jack, "I suppose I can do that."

He was speaking to Snodgrass; and they were alone now, for the boy in the red English uniform had also gone.

"You're to give it to my wife—no one else, you understand!"

"Yes, sir," said Jack, though he wished the commission had been intrusted to another.

Snodgrass started across the ice, and reaching his carriage, was driven rapidly to the railway station, several streets distant.

Jack looked round for Lafe, and not seeing him, he skated on toward the shore.

As he did so, he was met by a young boy whom he knew to be Snodgrass' messenger and house servant.

The boy came up to Jack.

"I saw Mr. Snodgrass, as he drove up the street to the station," he said, "and he told me to tell you to give that package to me, and for me to take it to Mrs. Snodgrass."

Jack's hand went toward his pocket, where he had placed the package.

Then he remembered that Mr. Snodgrass had particularly instructed him to deliver the package to Mrs. Snodgrass in person, and to no one else.

His hand came away from the pocket.

"Mr. Snodgrass told me to take it to his house myself, and give it to Mrs. Snodgrass."

"And he told me to come down here and get it," the boy insisted.

Jack was tempted to give it to him; but again he recalled Snodgrass' positive instructions.

"No, I can't do it," he said; "I'll take it myself."

"Aren't you going to let me have it?" the boy insisted.

"I told you I wasn't; I shall do just what Mr. Snodgrass told me to."

"Well, then, he can't blame me," said the boy, moving away. "I've asked you for it."

Not many people were on the ice now, and these were further up along the shore.

Jack halted near the fence that inclosed the new ice, from which most of the skaters preferred to keep as far as possible, and there began to take off his skates.

CHAPTER IV.

A TREACHEROUS ASSAULT.

He had removed his skates and was about to rise when he heard skates whizz and grind behind him.

The next instant he was knocked down by a stunning blow on the head.

The blow was so heavy that it reduced him to temporary helplessness and half-consciousness. He seemed paralyzed by it; and could do nothing but lie where he had fallen, without sound or motion.

As he lay thus he had a dim half knowledge that some one was fumbling in his pockets.

He did not resent it; it seemed like a dream, and he had no will of his own.

He heard a voice mumbling and exclaiming, but it sounded far off and indistinct.

He tried to arouse himself, with a growing feeling that something terrible had happened, or was happening.

With great difficulty he rolled over and struggled to his knees.

No one was by his side. His head felt as if it would split, and he trembled with weakness and dizziness.

Then he saw the red uniform close by the ice, on the shore, and the boy who wore it going toward the town in a hurried way.

Instantly all that had occurred came back to Jack Lightfoot like a flash.

He thrust his hand into the pocket where he had put the precious package consigned to his care by Snodgrass.

It was gone.

He felt quickly in his other pockets.

Yes, the package was gone.

He stumbled almost blindly to his feet, and tried to run after the boy who was vanishing along the street.

"Kirtland!" he shouted. "Hi, there—Kirtland!"

The boy leaped as if a bullet had whistled past his ears, when he heard that, and broke into a quick run.

"Stop, Kirtland!" Jack bellowed, in a tremor of passion and bewilderment.

Seeing that Kirtland did not intend to stop, but was rapidly getting himself out of sight, Jack pulled his energies together and started in pursuit.

He yelled, and ran blindly; then tumbled forward on his face at the edge of the ice, falling in a heap.

A moment later, as it seemed, he felt arms about him.

In his dizzy brain he had a feeling that Phil Kirtland had come back and was attacking him.

He struggled, striking out furiously.

Then he recognized the voice of Lafe Lampton.

"Jiminy Crickets, what's the matter with you?" Lafe panted in protestation, as Jack's fist struck him in the face. "Here I came to help you, and you try to give me a thumping."

The realization that this was his friend, Lampton, tended to sober Jack Lightfoot and steady his brain.

Again he recalled the theft of the package and the sight of that vanishing figure. He knew he had been robbed.

He stopped his struggles.

"Lafe—Lafe!"

"Yours to command," said Lafe, "but don't hit me again! I've been using complexion beautifiers on my face lately, and I don't want the effect spoiled."

"Lafe, I've been robbed!" Jack contrived to stammer.

He caught Lampton's arm and lifted himself.

"Jiminy Crickets, you've been——"

"Robbed! And by Phil Kirtland!"

"What?"

"It's the truth, if I ever spoke it. He came on me here, cracked me over the head with something, and when I fell almost senseless, he went through my pockets, and took a package containing a thousand dollars, which Snodgrass gave me to take up to his house."

It was not often that Lafe Lampton became excited, but he was certainly in that condition now.

"Jiminy Cr—— a thousand dollars! Say, you're sure it was Kirtland? Which way did he go?"

"I'm sure of it; I saw him as he ran away, and he went toward the town."

"Then we'll get that money back, or break his head—or have him arrested in short order."

He whistled and stared; then began to help Lightfoot to his feet.

Jack stood up, clinging to Lafe and swaying weakly. His head thumped like a drum and everything seemed to be reeling round.

"Say," said Lafe, feeling that light was coming to him, "that must have been one of Kirtland's foot jokes; he thinks he's funny, you know! He did it to give you a scare. He wouldn't take the money to keep it; and he'll hand it back, all right."

"It wasn't any joke the way he cracked me over the head. He almost crushed my skull in. Perhaps we can overtake him."

He was panting heavily. He tried to run, and swayed as if about to fall.

"No use to run after him," said Lafe. "You can't stand, hardly, and he'd outrun me quick enough; Kirtland is a sprinter, you know."

With Lafe's help Jack Lightfoot stepped upon the land, trembling and shaking.

"Kirtland will return that money, all right," said Lafe, consolingly. "He must know that you saw him."

"I don't think he knew it, for he knocked me senseless, and I lay there like a log; but I had enough mind

left to know that he felt in my pockets. When I could get my eyes open he was striking out for town at a hot pace, and the package and money were gone!"

The whole thing seemed impossible to Lafe Lampton; yet he could not doubt Jack Lightfoot.

"Just one of Kirtland's jokes," said Lafe. "It's a fool joke, but Kirtland's built that way."

Lafe Lampton did not like Phil Kirtland very well, yet he was not willing to think the other would take money without any intention of returning it. He had never heard Kirtland spoken of as a thief.

"Kirtland wouldn't take that money to keep it!" he insisted.

"Perhaps you'll say he wouldn't knock me down?"

"I would have said it, yes; but, of course, you know what you're talking about, and that settles it. If Kirtland took the money he'll return it, I feel pretty certain."

Jack Lightfoot went suddenly hot and cold.

All at once he saw the situation in which he was placed.

Even his friend, Lafe Lampton, was not willing to believe that Phil Kirtland would do such a thing.

Even Jack acknowledged that he himself would not have believed it, before the thing happened.

He reeled giddily, clutching at Lafe's arm, as that realization came to him.

"They'll believe that I'm the thief!" was his thought.

"They'll say that the money wasn't taken from me, that nobody knocked me down, but that the whole thing was made up by me, so that I could keep the money myself!"

"Lafe," he said, his voice shaking quite as much as his body, "you believe that I'm honest, don't you?"

"Sure thing!" said Lafe. "I know you are."

It was odd, to hear these expressions from that Jewish figure.

"I thank you for that!"

Lafe whistled in surprise.

"Say, you're queer to-night—you're nutty! What made you say that?"

"Don't you see the position I'm placed in?"

"Why, you're all right, if Kirtland gives back the money. He ought to be thumped for it, and for hitting you that way, though perhaps he didn't mean to really hurt you."

"Lafe, Phil Kirtland never intends to give back that money! He will say that he knows nothing about it; that he never touched me, or saw me after the package came into my hands. What then? The people will say that I've lied about the whole thing."

Lafe stared.

He had taken off his mask and put it in his pocket, as Jack had already done his. Now he took off his skates.

"Jiminy Crickets, you don't think——"

"That's just what I think—and that's what I know. Even you aren't willing to believe that Kirtland took it."

"I'm willing to believe what you say, but Kirtland never was known as a thief."

"That's just it; and I can see already that nobody will believe my story."

He tried to walk on.

The arms of the dude went round the shoulders of the mock sailor boy.

"Here, I'll help you," said Lafe; "and Jack, just recollect that I'm your friend, and can be depended on to stand by you, in this or anything else. You're all right, and I know it. There's no use in hurrying yourself out of breath. If, as you say, Kirtland took that money, we know where to find him any time."

"There it is!" cried Jack, exasperation mingled with his other feelings. "If Kirtland took it, as I say! Why, I know he took it. There can't be any doubt about it, I had it right here in this pocket. He knocked me on the head; I felt him put his hand in my pockets;

I saw him on the shore hurrying away, and the money was gone."

"You didn't see him before he struck you?"

"No."

"Then maybe somebody else did it."

"There was no one else near me."

"There might have been."

"There wasn't—I say there wasn't; not another soul anywhere near me."

"Well, we won't quarrel about that."

He assisted Jack Lightfoot along a few steps, and Jack began to feel his strength returning, though his head still whirled dizzily.

"Make a search through your pockets," Lafe suggested. "You might have put it in another one, you know."

"I have searched."

"Search again; here, I'll help you."

The pockets were gone through again.

"It isn't there," said Lafe, regretfully. "I was hoping it might be. Wait a minute and I'll look round on the ice where the thing happened."

Jack sank weakly to the ground, feeling that he could not stand alone.

Lafe Lampton went back upon the ice, where he made a thorough search, poking about with his dude cane, but discovered nothing.

CHAPTER V.

PHIL KIRTLAND'S DENIAL.

"Jack," said Lafe, when he came back, "there's a big mystery here, and I won't deny it. I want you to tell me the whole thing; how old Snod happened to give you that money, and all. I don't say this, thinking that maybe you ain't all right. You are, and I know it, and I'm going to stand by you in this thing till the cows come home."

Jack rose to his feet, with Lafe's assistance; and

they moved together slowly up the street, while Jack informed his friend of all the circumstances.

"Do you think you could walk as far as Kirtland's?"

"Yes," Jack answered. "I'm feeling better—stronger, I mean."

"We'll go there straight off then, and we'll see what it means. I still think Kirtland intended that for a clumsy joke."

They went to Kirtland's home, a large house, in the suburbs, some distance away.

The Kirtlands were well-known and wealthy people, or, at least, people in good circumstances.

There was still a light in the parlor, and in some of the other rooms.

As he looked up at the big house, standing with his friend, Lampton, in the street by the gate, Jack Lightfoot's heart sank.

"Kirtland's got money, or his folks have; why should he want to do a thing like that, unless it was for a joke?"

It was Lafe Lampton who spoke, but he voiced Jack's own thought.

"I can't tell you," said Jack, feeling that he wanted to run off somewhere and hide himself where people would never see him.

It was the old feeling, which he had determined to fight to the last ditch.

So he squared his shoulders.

"Well, we'll see," said Lafe; "we'll find out what he meant by it."

"But if—if he denies it?" said Jack.

"That's for you to say," Lafe answered.

They passed through the gate. Though he was still weak, Jack walked now without assistance; yet his eyes blurred at times, and he had a continual sense of faintness. Only his strong will kept him up.

Lafe Lampton rang the bell.

A servant answered it, and stared, when he beheld the queer costumes.

"Beg your pardon," said Lafe, seeing that Jack hesitated. "But is Mr. Phil Kirtland in? If he is, we'd like to see him for a few minutes on very important business."

The servant vanished, leaving them standing in the hall. But he came back, shortly.

"Mr. Phil Kirtland is in," he said; "and he'll see you in his room."

He led the way, up the stairs and along a corridor.

A door was open on this corridor, and light came from it.

Jack trembled, but he resolved to be brave and to put a bold face on the matter.

"Confidence!" he whispered to himself. "Kirtland is in the wrong, and is the guilty party, not you! Confidence."

"Come in," Kirtland called, when he saw who they were.

When they entered they found that he had taken off his red coat and hung it up, and had replaced it with a loose smoking jacket.

"Hello!" he said, not very good-humoredly. "Come up to talk about that challenge business? I thought that was all settled."

"It is settled," said Lafe,

"It's settled," Jack declared, "and we've come on a very different errand."

Though he was still faint, he was pulling his courage together by a strong effort of his will.

"Take seats," invited Kirtland, waving his hand airily. "This is my private boudoir, you know; but I was half undressed, and I thought I'd rather see you up here than to come down. Now, what is it I can do for you?"

Jack's temper flamed suddenly.

This cool, smiling young fellow was pretending ignorance of everything.

"You ought to know what we came up here for!" he urged.

Kirtland waved his hand again, with cool assurance.

"My dear Lightfoot, how could I, inasmuch as I'm not gifted with second-sight, or anything of that kind? I naturally supposed you wanted to talk about that hockey match."

Jack caught his breath, in anger and amazement.

"You knocked me down on the ice a little while ago, and while I was not more than half conscious and unable to help myself you went through my pockets and took out a package containing a thousand dollars, which Mr. Snodgrass had given me but a moment or two before to take to his wife!"

Phil Kirtland's face flamed to a furious red.

He jumped to his feet, and lunged at Jack as if about to strike him.

"Here, here!" said Lampton, interposing. "None of that! We didn't come up here to fight, but to find out about that."

"What about it?" Kirtland seemed about to fly into a wild passion again. "Why, I denounce it as a falsehood and an unmitigated slander."

He looked Jack in the face. Jack's face was white, and he trembled. Kirtland's face was as red as the English coat he had worn, and he trembled, too, but for a different reason.

"Did you make that lie up because you took a spite at me this evening out there on the ice?" he demanded. "This is spite work!"

"Nothing of the kind." Jack was resolved to hold himself in—to control his temper, if he could. "Nothing of the kind. I've no spite against you, and——"

"Yet you tell a lie like that about me!"

"You didn't take the money?" said Lafe.

Kirtland turned on him.

"Lampton, do you want me to punch your head off? Say that again and I will."

"All right, Kirtie, sail in; I'll stand up meek against the wall and let you. I said we didn't come up here to quarrel; but you bet I don't let anybody hit me with-

out trying to hit the aforesaid individual as hard as I know how. I asked you a question. Now I ask it again, just to get things straight. You didn't take that money?"

"No!" howled Kirtland. "No—no—no! Can you understand that? I know nothing about it. I never saw the money. I never heard of the thing, until now. Does that satisfy you?"

"It does," said Lafe, "so far as it goes."

"So far as it goes?"

"I——"

Kirtland seemed about to leap at him, but Lafe put up his dude cane.

"Now, see here; we're here to straighten out a tangle, not to fight or fuss. You can answer questions, and I'll say what I think. I thought, perhaps, you took it as a sort of joke, thinking to give it back to Jack again."

"I never saw it; I know nothing about it!"

Fortunately the door of Kirtland's room had been closed, or the sounds of this heated dialogue would have reached the people in the parlor.

"Kirtland," said Jack, trembling, "I could believe that if I didn't know better."

He was astonished and angry.

"I'm a liar, am I?"

"Yes, I've got to say that you are, or prove myself a liar. You knocked me down on the ice there by the board fence, just when I'd taken my skates off and was ready to come uptown; and you took from my pockets—this pocket," he patted the pocket of the sailor jacket with his hand, "the package which Mr. Snodgrass gave me."

"Did you see me?"

"I did; I saw you as plainly as I see you now, as you skipped along the street, a second or two after."

"But you didn't see me take it?"

"I felt you take it."

"You didn't see me take it?" Kirtland persisted.

"No; but no one else was there, or near there."

For a moment Kirtland seemed about to jump on him; but Jack was enraged and felt now like fighting, and he would have given the other all he wanted, and perhaps more, if they had mixed then and there.

"I'm not going to take it back, Kirtland. You took that thousand dollars. I've come for an explanation. You deny the whole thing. Now, I demand the money!"

Kirtland sat down.

He seemed to change his mind about attacking Jack Lightfoot, or something; at least, he sat down, and looked hard at the boys who stood accusingly before him.

It was a strange picture—Kirtland in his smoking jacket and the other two in the masquerade costumes they had worn on the ice.

"Lightfoot, if I declare to you that I know nothing about that, will you believe it?" Kirtland asked.

"No, I won't," said Jack, savagely. "I saw you, and I felt you go through my pockets."

Kirtland hesitated.

Even Lafe Lampton noted the change in his manner—the sudden change; and it almost convinced Lafe that Kirtland was guilty.

Up to that time Lafe had felt that he could not be.

He did not doubt Jack in the least; but he thought that some one else must have come up behind Jack and committed the deed—some one whom Jack had not been able to see, and that this person had made his escape while Jack was lying on the ice only half conscious.

Now he began to think that Kirtland's change of manner showed guilt.

"Well, I know nothing about it!" said Kirtland, his voice rising in an irritated way.

"You don't intend to surrender the money?" Jack asked, hotly.

"I can't surrender something I haven't got and know nothing about."

"What if I have you arrested?"

Kirtland started from his chair.

"Lightfoot," his face paled, "if you do that, and disgrace me before the people of Cranford, so help me, I'll get even with you. I didn't take that money."

"But I saw you running away; and if you didn't take it, who did? No one else was there. I saw you running away!"

Kirtland hesitated again, with that strange change in his manner apparent. He seemed about to deny that Jack had seen him there on the shore near the ice after the robbery.

"You recognized me by my clothing?"

"I did—I recognized you! I saw you there!" Jack persisted. "You can't deny it!"

"Oh, go along, Lightfoot! You wouldn't believe anything I'd say, nor Lafe wouldn't."

"You won't deny it—you can't deny it!" Jack exclaimed.

"I shan't deny anything, I tell you," Kirtland shouted, becoming savage again, "except that I didn't take that money, knew nothing about it, and wouldn't have taken it if it had been stuck under my nose."

"Well, what do you expect me to do about it?" Jack asked, his lips trembling. "I'm put in a hole by your action."

Kirtland thought a moment.

"Yes, I reckon you are. The people will think you kept it, and made up a story to cover your guilt? Is that what you mean?"

"Don't you think they will—can't you see they will?"

Kirtland now made a most surprising request.

"Jack, do you suppose you could keep this thing quiet?"

"And suffer for what *you* did? Wasn't it bad enough to be treated that way—to be knocked down and half killed, and——"

"Steady, Lightfoot!"

Kirtland seemed trying to be cool now.

"You couldn't keep still about it?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, and I don't intend to."

"Then go ahead!"

"I shall tell Mrs. Snodgrass, and Mr. Snodgrass as soon as he gets back."

"Go ahead!" cried Kirtland, doggedly. "I'm through! I've denied everything, and you say I'm a liar—and that means that I'm a thief. If it comes to a show-down between us, who will be believed by the people of Cranford; Phil Kirtland, whose father has always been an honorable man, or Jack Lightfoot, whose father——"

Jack leaped at him, with a cry of rage, and caught him by the collar, jamming him back against the wall and half overturning the chair.

His fingers closed on Kirtland's throat, and he seemed about to smash his fist into Kirtland's face.

"Here, here!" cried Lafe, springing forward and catching Jack's arm.

"Kirtland," said Jack, his voice shaking with passion, "you can say things about me, but if you say anything against my father I'll make you repent it!"

Kirtland was wheezing, as Jack removed his hand.

That startling attack, so unexpected, had shaken Kirtland's courage.

Jack Lightfoot, angered, had whipped Ben Birkett, fairly and squarely. Kirtland knew that; but he knew, too, that Jack was not a fighter, or, at least, had never possessed the reputation of one.

"I was enraged when I said that," he admitted, pushing Jack away. "I take it back, Lightfoot."

Jack stood before him, panting and gasping, his wrath almost uncontrollable.

"Kirtland," he gasped, "if—if you ever speak disrespectfully of my fa-father again, I'll—I'll——"

"That's all right, Lightfoot! I think well of a boy

who thinks well of his father; and I take back what I said. I'll not fight you about that. Some time, if we happen to mix on other things, I'll try to give you all you want; but I won't fight you about that."

"But you took the money!" said Jack, still panting. "And other people will say the thing you started to say!"

Kirtland threw out his hand impatiently.

"Saw it off, Lightfoot! I didn't take the money, and I don't know anything about it."

"You stick to that lie?"

"I stick to it, and it isn't a lie!" Kirtland cried, fiercely.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNHAPPY DAY.

As Jack Lightfoot and Lafe Lampton went away from Kirtland's room and from the big house where Phil Kirtland lived, they talked over the peculiar situation.

Jack Lightfoot was nervous, weak and bewildered.

He had not recovered from the effects of the terrible blow which had knocked him senseless on the ice. In addition, Phil Kirtland's strenuous denials, connected with his queer manner, irritated and puzzled him. He foresaw that the theft of the money was likely to be charged to him and his story discredited, if not positively disbelieved.

"It's getting late, Lafe," he said, as they walked down the street toward the heart of Cranford, "but before I go home I must tell Mrs. Snodgrass about this. I can't sleep if I don't, and I doubt if I shall be able to sleep, after I've told her."

"All right, if you think it's best; but I believe I'd wait. Kirtland may make a confession."

"He'll deny everything; he's already denied everything."

"Yes, but I could see he was uneasy."

"I must see Mrs. Snodgrass before I go home."

"All right then, come along. What are you going to say to her about Kirtland?"

Jack Lightfoot had been thinking of that.

"I think I'll not mention his name. I'll just say I was knocked down and the money taken from me by a boy who was masked."

"She'll ask you to describe him; and if you say he wore that red coat, then she'll find out who he was."

Nevertheless, Jack told his story, with much trembling, to Mrs. Snodgrass.

She was fairly stunned.

"Dear me," she said, throwing up her hands, "this is dreadful! But I never trouble myself about business matters, and you'll have to see my husband."

Jack was glad to escape without a severe questioning.

Lafe accompanied him home and up to the door.

"I think I'd better go all the way home with you," he said, as if the thing needed to be excused; "you're pretty shaky, from that crack you got on the head."

Jack thanked him, and stood by the window watching him as he passed up the street, swinging his dudish cane, but walking in anything but a dudish manner now.

Jack's mother had retired, and Jack crept silently up to his room, feeling weak and miserable.

"Just when everything seemed to be coming my way to have this happen!" he groaned.

His face flushed again, as he recalled the slur thrown out by Kirtland concerning his father.

"I'd fight him, if he was as big as a house, if he insulted the memory of my father without cause," was his angry thought.

So Jack went to bed, but lay awake a long time. The hours were wearing along toward morning before he fell into even a troubled doze.

Having fallen into an uneasy slumber at last, he overslept, and was aroused by his mother, as she bent to kiss his flushed and feverish face.

He started up, with an exclamation.

"You skated too hard, and were out too late last night, Jack," she said, anxiously. "I think I'll have to forbid you going out at night, unless you can get in earlier."

Jack arose, and without a word he made his toilet and came downstairs.

At the breakfast table, after much hesitation, and some questioning on his mother's part, Jack told his story.

The revelation frightened his mother and whitened her face.

"I would have told you at once," he said, by way of explanation, "but I hated to load my troubles on you." His mother came round the table and put her arms about him.

"Jack," she said, tenderly, "that's what mothers are for—or to help their sons, don't you know? Anyway, that's what one mother is for."

Yet she was troubled, and there were tears in her eyes as she went back to her seat, and tears in her throat as well.

"Just be honest, Jack, and speak the truth," she urged. "Lafe knows that you are honest; and so does Tom, and others; and if the rest of the town should think differently, even they will know the truth some time."

As he passed on his way to school, he chanced to meet Prof. Sanderson, who was on his way to the academy.

Sanderson stepped out of the path, as if contact with Jack Lightfoot might bring contamination.

Jack's blood boiled when he saw that.

Having gone out of his way to avoid Jack, Sanderson changed his mind and stopped.

"Lightfoot," he said, "I think I shall have that acceptance of the challenge for the hockey game recalled to me now."

"Why?" asked Jack. "And why did you step out of

the way? I haven't smallpox, nor contagion of any kind."

A black look came to Sanderson's face.

"You have the contagion of a bad example, and the bad example of your father!"

Something like a pain gripped at Jack's heart, and for a moment he felt like flying at Sanderson as he had at Phil Kirtland.

"Did my father ever really harm you?" he asked.

"He did. And since that occurrence of last night I think, as principal of the academy, I shall have to stop that hockey match. I don't want my boys to play with you, or with boys who associate with you."

Jack saw that Sanderson had been told about the stolen money.

"Perhaps I don't understand you," he said, to make sure, "and you'll be willing to explain?"

"I speak of that theft last night—I suppose I must call it that. You had a thousand dollars delivered to you, it seems. You claim that you haven't it now, and that somebody knocked you down and took it away from you."

"Prof. Sanderson, I told only the truth."

"Lightfoot, I don't care to be seen talking to you; but I'd advise you, as a friend, to find out where that money is and restore it. You mustn't think that you can keep it, and escape punishment."

Jack wanted to take refuge in flight, yet he stood his ground.

"Did Kirtland tell you that?" he asked.

"He did; and of the outrageous charge you brought against him. But it isn't the first time that a rascal has shouted: 'Stop, thief!'"

Prof. Sanderson hastened away, with this parting shot, and Jack Lightfoot dragged himself on to school, feeling more unhappy than words can tell.

From the position of the most care-free boy in Cranford he had suddenly been made the most miserable.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE GYMNASIUM.

One of the results of Jack Lightfoot's heroism on the ice the week before had been manifested in a manner that has not yet been set forth.

At the close of the ice-yacht race the ice had broken under the weight of the crowd that streamed out on in it, and Kate Strawn, who had been skating toward the shore, plunged into the hole almost before she knew it was there, and was saved only by the heroic work of Jack Lightfoot, who leaped into the icy water to her rescue.

Aided by his friend, Lafe Lampton, he had saved the life of the girl.

Jack was not a boy who would take money for such an act of bravery.

Knowing this, Kate's father, Norwell Strawn, who was the proprietor of Strawn's dry-goods store, and one of the prominent men of Cranford, offered, for the use of Jack and his friends, the large upper floor of the old carriage shop, telling them they might fit it up as a gymnasium and practice room for their games and sports.

Not only this, but Strawn generously offered his financial aid in the purchase of such equipment and apparatus as the boys needed.

It was Jack Lightfoot's way, to help himself always before accepting the aid of anyone else.

He felt glad to have for himself and friends the use of the upper floor of the carriage shop, and was also willing, if Strawn chose to do it, to have that gentleman purchase and give to the high-school boys such things as they could not make for themselves.

This upper floor had been fitted up in a simple way, with horizontal bars, rings and the like; and as his first contribution Strawn had given some dumb-bells, Indian clubs, and a big wrestling and jumping pad.

He had promised other things in the near future.

The boys, themselves, were building parallel bars and were considering the construction of a trapeze.

Jack Lightfoot had thrown himself into these playthings with vigor and vim.

He was a capable boy with tools, as he had shown when he built his ice yacht.

And what Jack did not know in regard to constructing almost any sort of athletic device, Tom Lightfoot, his cousin, whom the boys called "The Bookworm," because he was always nosing in a volume, would be pretty certain to find in some book, magazine or paper.

Jack Lightfoot took his way to the new gymnasium that night very ill at ease.

The mystery of the abstracted package of money had not been cleared up. Snodgrass was still absent, but he might return soon, and Jack wondered what he would do then.

With any good pretext, Jack would have remained at home. But the night before some matters for discussion had remained unsettled; and he knew, besides, that the boys would be anxious to hear what he had to say about the hockey match.

As he reached the lower door of the carriage shop he encountered his cousin, Tom.

Tom was a student at the academy, and it rather surprised Jack to find him there. He thought at once of the lost money, and wondered what Tom had heard about it.

But Tom did not speak of that.

"I've brought down a paper for you to read in your club to-night," he said.

"Come on in and take a look at the gym," Jack invited.

"Well, I should like to, if it will be all right with your fellows."

In the upper room a great noise of voices could be heard, as they ascended the stairway together.

"What is this paper?" Jack asked.

Tom stopped on the stairway, and turned toward Jack.

"You'll have to read it; I don't understand it, myself. But it's a declination of your challenge. Kirtland says he won't play your team, and that you know why."

"He didn't say why himself?"

"No. None of the boys know; but Kirtland declared positively he wouldn't play, nor have his team play. The fellows say that it's because you've got such a poor team that it would be a disgrace to play against it. I don't believe that's the reason myself; I think there's something back of it, but I can't guess what it is."

For a moment Jack Lightfoot was on the point of telling his cousin what it was, but he hesitated, and they went on upstairs together.

The Babel of voices rose to a clamor when Jack was in the doorway, and his friends came streaming to him, all talking at once.

They wanted to know about the coming hockey match.

Lafe Lampton was there, and he came lazily toward Tom Lightfoot. As usual, Lafe was eating an apple.

"Tom," he cried, laughing, "you're in the wrong parlor car! It's an awful pity, too, for you're a dacent fellow, as Jerry Mulligan told me himself."

"If I may stay a while I'll be good," Tom promised.

"Oh, you couldn't be; nobody from the academy can be. We're awfully down on your crowd; and Saturday afternoon we're going to do you up. We've just been figuring how we'll do it; this way, see! Whiff—bang—goal."

He struck with an imaginary hockey stick at an imaginary puck.

"That's easy," said Tom; "but what will we be doing at that time, while you're hammering goals? We'll be standing there permitting you to do it—I don't think."

Tom Lightfoot belonged to Phil Kirtland's hockey team, and was one of its best players.

"We'll have you glued fast to the ice!" Lafe declared.

Jack Lightfoot, with the boys about him, saw quickly that though Phil Kirtland had spoken of the missing money to Prof. Sanderson he had said nothing about it promiscuously.

These boys, with the exception of Lafe Lampton, knew nothing of it at all.

Thereupon, though he felt nervous enough, he brightened outwardly.

"What about the hockey match?" said Ned Skeen.

Skeen had been doing some stunts on the horizontal, but had dropped to the pad and came forward when he saw Jack appear.

"Yes, that's what we want to know?" others cried.

"I think we ought to get out on the ice and practice to-night, if we're going up against those fellows Saturday," still another declared.

"Wait a minute, and perhaps I can tell you something about it," said Jack.

He tore open the envelope given to him by Tom, and read:

"To the proper officers of the high-school hockey team:

"I decline to meet you Saturday afternoon with the academy team, for reasons that I am not at liberty to make known now. PHILIP KIRTLAND."

The boys stared blankly.

"Ah! tell him to go chase himself. What's the reason they won't meet us?"

Lafe Lampton, standing by the wall, thumped Tom Lightfoot on the chest with the back of his hand.

"Tommy, that saves your bacon!"

Lafe was as cheerful, apparently, as if he carried in his bosom no weighty secret.

Some of the boys swarmed round Tom Lightfoot.

"What's the reason you fellows won't meet us?" they asked.

Tom laughed.

Lafe took another bite of apple.

"We don't want to defeat you and make you feel bad," said Tom.

"Ah! try again, that isn't the reason?"

"If you know, you tell me."

"But what is the reason?" they clamored.

Lafe Lampton chewed meditatively upon his bite of apple. He knew the reason well enough, and was wondering what he ought to say. Finally he decided to say nothing, and took another bite of apple, to cure his temporary nervousness.

"I heard what one boy said," a voice declared, in the midst of the clamor.

"What did he say?" Ned Skeen demanded.

"He said the academy team would play us when we knew how to play. His exact words were, 'Go out and beat some street team and get a reputation, and then we'll talk to you!'"

"Ah! they just want to squeal out of it."

"They're afraid we'll beat them."

"And they'd die of the disgrace, if we did."

All the boys were speaking at once, and the result was confusion.

Jack Lightfoot walked across to the little table which had been brought up there, took a seat behind it, and rapped for order.

"I suppose we'll have to consider this in a business way," he said; "so the club will please come to order."

He was troubled, yet he tried not to show it either by his face or his voice.

When the noise ceased he stood up and read the note sent to the gymnasium by Kirtland.

"What do you say about it?" he asked. "They won't meet us."

"And after saying they would!" cried Ned Skeen, bobbing to his feet like a small cork popping up out of the water. "I think the reason, which he doesn't give, is that they're afraid we might defeat them, and

then the town would give them the 'ha! ha!' I shall challenge them again!"

A dozen voices rose, clamoring for this.

Jack sat quietly in his chair.

"What do *you* think?" some one shouted to him.

"If there's a motion made and properly seconded may take the floor to discuss it. Just now, there's nothing before the club."

Jack understood something of parliamentary usage.

Lafe Lampton rose slowly to his feet and stood for a moment in hesitation, with his mouth half open. Then, seeming to change his mind, he stopped his mouth with another bite of apple, and slowly sat down.

Ned Skeen popped to his feet again, jerky and nervous.

"Mr. President, if that's the way to do it, I make motion, sir, that we send a letter to those fellows, telling them that, as they have accepted the challenge there's going to be no backing out. When a challenge is accepted, it's accepted, and that's the end of it."

Ned was launching into an argument on this, when Jack shut him off.

"The motion hasn't been seconded," said Jack, "until it has been seconded and is put by your chairman it cannot be discussed. We agreed, I believe, to follow parliamentary rules, for our own benefit."

Another boy jumped up and seconded the motion, crying:

"I second the motion."

Jack now rose to his feet and put the motion:

"It has been moved and seconded that we send communication to the academy hockey club, saying that inasmuch as the challenge to play them next Saturday afternoon has been accepted we are unwilling that match shall be called off, and demand that it be played. I believe that's the substance of your motion, Mr. Skeen?"

"It is," said Skeen.

"Debate on this question is now in order," said Jack.

"Mr. Skeen, you may discuss the motion now, if you choose."

The discussion that followed was fast and furious. It was warm, too, and all one-sided. All the boys seemed to favor the motion, and were for forcing the academy team to meet them, now that the matter had gone that far.

Jack Lightfoot rose and called for the vote, when the discussion ended.

"All in favor of the motion, say 'Ay!'"

"Ay!" every one shouted, with the exception of Lafe Lampton, who had taken no part in the talk, and now munched his apple instead of voting.

"The motion is carried," said Jack; "and the secretary will write to the academy club at once, informing them of our action."

"And make the letter hot!" cried Ned Skeen.

Jack Lightfoot was really glad this course had been taken.

"Fellows," he said, and his face beamed with a strange light, "we'll see if we can't make them play us, now that you've voted as you have; and if they do play us, we're going to beat them. I feel confident of it to-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

JIU JITSU.

When this matter and some others had been attended to, and the business meeting of the new club had adjourned, athletic contests began among the club members.

"Gnat" Kimball stepped out into the middle of the floor.

His name was Nat Kimball, but because of his name, and because he was small, the boys often called him "Gnat," or "The Gnat."

Kimball was ambitious to be a wrestler and an athlete.

"Fellows," he said, "I've been reading up on this Jap business, and it's great. If you know how to do it,

a little chap can do up the biggest one that ever came at him."

He threw himself into a jiu-jitsu attitude.

Kimball had piercing black eyes, thin cheeks, and rather long hair which seemed to hang in wet locks. The boys claimed that he oiled it with goose grease, but Kimball asserted that he didn't.

"You need something in the way of science to help you out," said Bob Brewster.

The Brewster boys, brothers, were both present.

Bob was the younger of the two, but the larger and stronger. He was a big, red-faced, red-haired, good-natured fellow, with a quick temper, and the strength of a young giant.

Bill Brewster, his older brother, older by two years, was thinner, with rather hollow cheeks, and no great muscular development. His complexion and hair were not so fiery-red as Bob's, and he was more studious and brighter in his classes at school. Both attended the high school, and were members of Jack Lightfoot's hockey team.

Kimball, little and dark, looked at the red-haired giant in a comical way.

"Bob, if I wanted to I could use you up in a minute, with jiu jitsu."

"Jiu jitsu! That sounds like a swear word, doesn't it? But, I'll bet you couldn't."

He jumped out into the middle of the floor, and the other boys gathered round him and Kimball.

"Stand back now, fellows," said "Gnat."

"Yes," said Bob Brewster, "stand back; he don't want to kill but one fellow at a time—that's me!"

He thumped himself on his thick chest and looked at little Kimball.

"Now, Gnat, do me up! Jiu jitsu, you can't do it!"

"Well, I can, all right; I've been practicing this thing for a month, on the q. t. I can break your arm, if I've a mind to."

"There it is—break it."

"I'll try the full Nelson on you first," said Kimball, with the utmost confidence. "That's a wrestling hold, in the Japanese catch-as-catch-can."

"Oh, it is, is it? Then give me the Nelson; I want to see what it's like."

"I'll have to do it easy, for I might break your neck, you know."

"Jiminy Crickets!" said Lafe Lampton, "hear the Gnat sing his little song!"

Lafe took a bite of apple contentedly.

"It's this way," said Gnat. "Bend your head over, and stretch your arms out straight. Then I'll put my arms under your arms at the shoulders, and lock my hands together over the back of your neck. When I do that I've got you; and if I used force enough I could simply break your neck, or throw you to the ground."

"Let's see you do it!"

"First act in the great drama—'Ajax Defying the Lightning,'" said Lafe, as he chewed his apple.

Kimball put his arms under the armpits of the bigger boy and clasped his hands tightly round the back of his neck, pressing with them against the base of Bob Brewster's red head.

"Ow! that does feel funny!" said Bob. "What next?"

"Don't you feel anything?" asked Gnat.

"Yes; I feel you."

"Now, down you go!"

Bob Brewster straightened his huge form, threw back his red head with a mighty surge, and whirling round tossed Kimball to the floor in a heap.

"Jiminy Crickets, jitu jitsu is hot stuff!" said Lafe, coughing as he swallowed a piece of his apple the wrong way.

The other boys simply howled.

Kimball scrambled up, red-faced, and tossed his oily black locks.

"I guess I didn't get the right hold," he cried, apologetically.

"Try it again," cried Bob, with a grin. "Jiu jitsu you ought to be able to do that dead easy! I stood still and let you take the hold you wanted. But say, when there's a fight on in this jiu-jitsu business is it the rule for the fellow that's billed to be licked to stand still and let the other fellow catch him just where he likes?"

"No, of course not," said Kimball.

"I didn't know," Bob declared, dryly. "That's the way you did."

"But this is just practice!"

"Try it again."

Kimball felt his defeat too severely to wish to try it again just then.

He had picked himself up and was carefully polishing his hands on his handkerchief. He looked at them closely to make sure that they were specklessly clean.

"What's that for?" asked Bob. "So you can get a better hold?"

"No. I fell on the floor on my hands and got dirt on them, and I'm afraid of germs."

He polished again at his hands, while the boys hooted.

Kimball had become a "germ fiend." He had been reading something along that line lately, and so had his mother, and they had agreed to be very careful in the future.

"You see, everything is covered with germs," he explained. "Even the air we breathe."

"Quit breathing, then," said Bob, grinning.

"A fellow can't do that, you know, but he can be careful."

"Tie a strainer over your nose," Lafe suggested, taking another bite of apple.

"I wish I could," said Kimball, again looking at his hands. "Say, this floor has got to be kept cleaner than this or my mother won't let me come up here any more. But, fellows, truly, everything is covered

with germs; they're in everything—the food, the water, the air, and especially in the soil of the streets, and some of you fellows have tracked some of that soil up here."

"Get a shovel," said Lafe, "some of you, and scoop the germs out for Kimball."

"But I ain't joking!" Kimball protested.

"You oughtn't to be afraid of germs," said Bob. "You're so little you're almost one yourself. But, jiu jitsu, what's the next strangle hold?"

"Well, I know one trick, by which I could break your arm, if I wanted to."

Bob Brewster slipped off his coat, and then rolled up his right sleeve, displaying an arm that was as white as milk, but big and muscular. His hands and wrists were red as boiled lobsters, and the whiteness of the skin above them gave to the arms a comical look.

"Break that!" he said. "You can't do it. Who did you practice on, while you've been breaking arms?"

"My brother."

The boys roared again, for Kimball's brother was little more than a baby.

"Break this one," said Bob. "It will be easier."

Kimball seized Bob's right hand with his left, drew his arm out with a jerk, and with the side of his right hand struck a quick blow on the back of Brewster's elbow.

But Brewster saw what he meant to do, and flexed his arm quickly, bending the elbow, so that Kimball struck his hand on the sharp bone.

He dropped Brewster's arm and caught his own right hand in his left, while a look of pain came to his face.

"Bu'sted your hand, eh?" questioned Bob, gravely.

"You didn't do that right!" Kimball protested.

"You must hold your arm out straight, and let me strike it on the elbow joint."

"Oh, I must—I don't think! Suppose you and I were fighting, would I stand still and let you whack

me on the elbow that way, and break my arm? No, that is what I'd do to you—in the good, old American fashion."

He swung his big red fist straight at Kimball's face; but stopped the blow short and let his hand drop.

"There are other tricks," said Kimball, still confident. "I didn't work that right—you didn't let me get the combination. You've got to——"

The other boys were howling, and Brewster began to put on his coat.

"Well, there's one thing I can beat you at," Kimball boasted; "that's jumping. I'll bet I can jump farther than you, and higher."

"If you jump high, Kimball, you're liable to hit the floor when you come down and get germs on you."

Then the jumping began, and as it was lively sport, nearly all the boys tried their skill at it.

There was wrestling, too, in which more than once Kimball was fairly made to eat "germs," as he wallowed over the floor.

But little "Gnat" was a plucky lad, and though put out more than once he was like that famous general who never knew when he was licked.

Then, out into the clear, cold night, the boys went, and took their several ways homeward, declaring that the gymnasium was a great thing, and feeling thankful in their hearts to Norwell Strawn.

Jack Lightfoot walked home accompanied by his cousin Tom, who had remained in the gymnasium throughout the evening, with the permission of the club.

As they thus walked homeward, Jack Lightfoot unburdened to his cousin the heavy weight that lay on his heart.

"That's an outrageous thing," said Tom, his sympathies thoroughly aroused. "I don't intend that our club shall refuse to meet yours for any secret reason like that. Though if we play you, we're going to play to win; that's honest sport, and I never go in for any

other kind. I'll be on our hockey team, and I'll do my best to help our fellows down yours, in a gentlemanly way, of course. But as for not playing your club for that reason, that's too mean; and as far as I'm concerned your challenge will be accepted, if I can have my way."

The loyalty of his cousin was a pleasant thing to Jack Lightfoot.

Jack was so altogether human that he felt the need of sympathy in a time of trial, as well as the need of telling his troubles to some one.

It gratified him to know that Lafe and Tom both believed he was honest and upright, and it strengthened him as well.

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE THE GAME.

The snapping, fiery letter which the secretary of the high school athletic club wrote to the hockey team of the academy, in accordance with the instructions given at the meeting in the gymnasium, had the desired result.

The academy boys, whom Phil Kirtland had not taken into his confidence, declared that the letter was an insult and they would surely play that hockey match with the "high-school kids," and "make them eat dirt."

"It will be the death of Gnat Kimball, if they do that," said Lafe Lampton, when he heard of this action.

"Perhaps they'll permit us to disinfect the dirt before we swallow it," suggested Jack Lightfoot, laughing.

"They'll have to, or it will kill Kimball. Any kind of dirt is full of germs, he says, and that kind I should think would be simply crawling with them. I'm troubled about it myself, and I ain't any germ crank."

He wiped the apple he had in his hand and took a bite.

"Jiminy Crickets, if this germ theory gets to running mad in Cranford I'll have to quit eating apples!"

"And that would be the death of you!"

"It would; I couldn't live without apples. Apples raw and apples cooked, apples green and apples ripe, apples sweet and apples sour—and apple pie. Oh, say, don't mention apple pie; even dried apple pie is better stuff for me!"

"I loathe, abhor, detest, despise,
Abominate dried apple pies!"

"If I knew who wrote that, I'd go hit him one."

"I've heard it was Whittier."

"Well, all I've got to say is he couldn't have lived where good apples grew. Some fellows like oranges and some prunes, and some like cigarettes; but good ripe, juicy, mellow, any old kind of apples, for me."

Then he took a bite.

Old Mr. Snodgrass still remained away from Cranford.

Jack desired his return, and dreaded it.

What he was to do when Snodgrass came back he could hardly tell, and his mother was not able to advise him.

He had resolved, though, to go straight to the gentleman, and make a clean statement of everything, let the result be what it might.

Jack Lightfoot practiced with his hockey team, and kept his thoughts and fears to himself, speaking of them to no one but Lafe and Tom.

He also urged all the gymnasium work possible, for nothing is better to get a hockey team in good form than gymnasium practice.

Fortunately, the boys were an athletic set of young fellows, even though there was much disparity in the strength and general physical merits, and active sports on the lake and out of doors had already hardened and toughened them, so that the gymnasium work did not make them sore or lame them.

Still, Jack Lightfoot could not feel as confident concerning the coming tournament as he wished to.

The morning of the match dawned clear and bright without much wind.

In the afternoon, when the hour for the game approached, people began to stream down to the lake and gather upon the ice.

Jack Lightfoot waited for Lafe, at the house, and they walked down to the lake together, Lafe, of course, eating an apple.

"Every physical director says that eating too much isn't good for a fellow who goes in for athletics," said Jack, as Lafe bit into his apple.

"That's all right," Lafe answered. "I never eat too much; I eat just enough—for me. You see, I'm bigger than some other fellows, and it takes more to fill me up."

A company of girls, among them Kate Strawn and Nellie Conner, came down to the ice, singing:

"Come, cross your blades upon the ice,
The air is keen, the watchers wait;
And eager as a cat for mice,
Around the puck the forwards skate.
Line up! In goal! The game is faced!
The puck's in play, the ice doth ring
Beneath the skates that seem to sing:
'We have no time to-day to waste.'"

"Howling mackerels! hear that?" cried Ned Skeen, coming by on a run, swinging his skates. "'We have no time to waste!' If those girls know so much about hockey, why don't they play this match themselves?"
"We weren't singing for your benefit, Ned," cried Kate Strawn.

"No, I know you wasn't; and I'm glad of it."

"You think you're the only thing!" said Kate, with a flash of indignation.

"I might say something to you like that, if I wanted to!"

Ned Skeen "hated" girls.

"What is it, smarty?"

"I might shout that 'you're not the only pullet on the ice-arch!' But that would be ungallant, and I won't."

"The horrid, mean thing!" cried Nellie Conner, as Ned dropped down on the ice and began to put on his skates.

"You've got to put my skates on for me for that," said Kate.

"I won't."

Jack Lightfoot came forward.

"I will," he said, kindly.

"You're in more of a hurry than Ned is, for you're captain."

But Jack stopped long enough to put on Kate's and Nellie's skates for them, and did the same for some of the other girls, while Lafe dropped his half-eaten apple into his pocket and assisted.

"Say, who's going to beat this afternoon?" Kate asked.

Before the ice-yacht race Kate had hoped that Jack Lightfoot would be defeated, and made no effort to conceal the hope.

"We are, of course," said Jack, laughing.

She bent toward them.

"Jack, I hope you will, even if Brodie is on the other side; and I know lots of other girls who do, too."

"That's good," said Jack; thank you."

"Confidence!" thought Jack. "That's what I need this afternoon."

"And you think you can beat them? They've got good players, and Kirtland is a good captain."

Jack looked up at her with a sudden flush.

"Kate," he said, "we'll beat them, if it's written down that the thing is possible."

CHAPTER X.

ICE HOCKEY.

The hockey game was on.

"Lightfoot, Lightfoot, you're the stuff!

You are in it now—no bluff!

Make a dive,

And let her drive;

You'll beat them—and this is no guff!"

A lot of the high-school boys were grouped together, singing loudly, a song of their own contriving.

The puck was being hammered in a lively style.

One of the prettiest spectacles afforded by a good hockey match was being witnessed just at that moment, as the forwards of the high-school team dashed down the ice, four abreast, with the puck.

When four men in a line race at lightning speed with the puck for the goal of their opponents something is doing in ice hockey.

It is then that the goal keeper of the threatened goal sees danger signals flying in the air, and every man of the opposing team is put upon his mettle.

The spectators crowding around the field of play yelled wildly in their enthusiasm, as the forwards came on and the skates flashed and the puck sped over the ice.

Edgrass, and

This was the arrangement of the teams:

HIGH SCHOOL	POSITION	ACADEMY
Lafe Lampton	Goal	Brodie Strawn
Bob Brewster	Point	Bat Arnold
Bill Brewster	Cover Point	Ralph Sanders
Arlo Kilfoyle	Right Center	Ben Henderson
Nat Kimball	Right Wing	Sam Tanner
Ned Skeen	Left Wing	Tom Lightfoot
Jack Lightfoot	Left Center	Phil Kirtland

Jack Lightfoot had stationed Lampton at the goal, supported by his heaviest man, Bob Brewster, as point, to assist him.

Jack was himself the "rover" of the forwards, and he was attempting team play, so far as was possible.

He had possession of the puck.

To escape the dash of the defenders of the academy goal, he shot it to his left wing; then leaped for it, as it came back, and lifted it for goal.

It was a grand rush, and he lifted the puck just right, shooting it along about knee high off the ice.

But Brodie Strawn, who was goal tender for the academy, was the right man in the right place, and he blocked it.

The puck came bouncing back; was caught by Nat Kimball's stick, and again went flying toward the goal.

A scrimmage resulted, there were yells of "off side," and the puck went skipping along the ice toward the middle of the field, and then drove toward the right side, with the forwards dashing after it.

Jack Lightfoot, now in the heat of the game, had forgotten about the thousand dollars which had been taken from him so strangely; the trembling and lack of confidence which had troubled him before the game began was also missing.

He was cool now—cool as the proverbial cucumber.

He saw only the ice, the puck, the charging and skating players, and his mind was fixed on victory.

The high-school boys let the puck be taken away from them, and it was sent by Tom Lightfoot flying toward the high-school goal.

Next to Phil Kirtland himself, Tom Lightfoot was the best hockey player on the academy team, with possibly the exception of Brodie Strawn, the goal keeper.

"Jiminy was lightning-quick on his skates, and was as nailing mad in cousin, Jack Lightfoot.

"And that he saw Tom's brilliant playing, wished he had his cousin on his own team, but he

did not repine about it, and he never for a moment doubted now that the high-school boys would though he knew that they would have to fight for victory and fight hard.

Lafe Lampton was doing business at the high-school goal, when the puck came toward him, passing both the Brewster boys.

It flew just knee high—a most difficult stop—Lafe blocked it cleverly with his right hand, and it drove it back.

Again there was a wild mix-up of skaters and swinging sticks, and the puck went toward the academy goal.

The high-school boys grouped on the ice together were singing lustily, as the spectators yelled; and that was their song:

"Lightfoot, Lightfoot, you are true;
You know the proper thing to do;
Make a dive,
And let her drive;
You can take that old puck through!"

"I'll do it—they're singing to me!" shouted Tom Lightfoot, as his stick caught the puck, and he drove it once more toward the high-school goal.

Bob Brewster stopped it and sent it back.

Ben Henderson got possession of it, and tried to send it to his left wing; but Jack Lightfoot drove and plucked it away, and with a rush dribbled it toward the academy goal.

The forwards of the academy charged at him.

He made a feint of sending the puck to Nat Kimball, who was expecting it, then lifted it with a great stroke.

It flew a little higher than he intended.

Cover point and point jumped for it; Brodie Strawn jumped to block it, but missed it by the slightest margins, and—it went between the goal posts!

Kate Strawn, who had clapped her hands for her brother's play, thinking he could stop it, clapped them still louder now when the puck passed him and a goal was scored.

"That girl's too changeable for me!" said Ned Skeen.

"As the thermometer said to the clerk of the weather," said Lafe Lampton, feeling to see if he had an apple anywhere about him, as he had now time to catch his breath—and eat, if he had anything to

"Howling mackerels, but that was great!" shouted Ned Skeen, turning to some of his friends.

Lafe turned toward Kate Strawn:

"Katie, wouldn't that jar the cherries off your grandmother's bonnet! Biff—bang—goal!"

The puck was faced again, in the center of the field, between the sticks of Jack Lightfoot and Phil Kirtland.

"You think you're going to win this game, I suppose?" said Phil.

That little speech, bringing momentary inattention, was to Kirtland's disadvantage.

"Play!" shouted the referee.

Swish—whizz!

Jack Lightfoot secured the puck and sent it flying toward the goal of the academy boys.

Ralph Sanders stopped it and sent it back, and it was caught by the stick of Ned Skeen.

Skeen was a nervous chap, but he was quick on his feet.

He rushed, dribbling the puck, toward the academy goal, and when it was about to be taken away from him he sent it flying.

Cover point and point tried for it, but it passed them, and also the goal keeper.

Goal!

Ned Skeen had driven goal.

He puffed out his chest like a pouter pigeon, when he saw what he had done.

"Howling mackerels, did you see that?"

"Neddy, you're hot stuff!" shouted Lampton.

"Sing me a few verses now, fellows!" he shouted, wiggling his fingers to the boys who were chorusing out on the ice.

They sang him a "few."

"Skeeney, Skeeney, don't get gay;
We're certain now that you can play;
Look alive,
And make a drive;
You can hold 'em all day!"

"'Rah for our side!" yelled one of the high-school boys, who was not in the game. "They said our team couldn't play marbles. 'Rah for our side!"

"Sicond blood fer the b'ys av the high school!" yelled Jerry Mulligan, taking his T. D. out of his mouth and waving it joyously. "I'm bettin' me wad on 'em!"

The play was on again, hot and furious.

Jack Lightfoot had placed his men to what seemed to him the best advantage. But Kirtland had been equally clever and he had some of the best players, too.

Tom Lightfoot was showing himself to be a veritable wonder on skates, and was playing for all he was worth, even though his cousin did happen to be captain of the opposing team.

Kirtland had secured possession of the puck, and passed it to Tom Lightfoot.

Another forward took it, to baffle the forwards of the high school; then it came back to Tom; and he sent it flying.

Lafe Lampton was too slow that time; and Tom Lightfoot drove in a goal.

Kate Strawn, who seemed to be distributing her favors quite evenly, clapped her hands and danced on the ice.

"That feminine thermometer is bobbing up and down again," growled Ned Skeen, who fancied at the moment that he "hated" girls worse than ever.

"Well, her brother is on that side," said Nat Kimball. "Give her credit for having some family feeling."

"Oh, you've got germs!"

"I will have, if you come near me."

The whistle blew.

The first twenty minutes of the match had ended.

The result was two goals for the high school and one for the academy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECOND HALF.

There was a rest of ten minutes.

The puck was faced again, in the center of the field. And the spectators held their breath.

At this moment, while all waited for the signal to begin play, old Mr. Snodgrass came walking out upon the ice.

Kirtland, half glancing up, saw him.

He trembled suddenly and his dark face paled.

The signal sounded.

Whish!

Jack Lightfoot, who had not seen Snodgrass, and

did not know of his arrival, took advantage of Kirtland's temporary confusion.

He had the puck, and was going with it like a hurricane for the opposite goal.

But he lost it to Ralph Sanders, who sent it skipping back.

There was a scrimmage.

The puck shot toward a side line.

It was stopped, and went toward the academy goal; then it came back toward the high-school goal.

The playing became so quick and brilliant that the crowd cheered in wild enthusiasm.

Yells and cries of advice resounded from all sides.

Jack Lightfoot heeded none of them. He saw only the puck.

He was showing that he possessed the first requisite of a captain and athletic leader—coolness, when coolness was needed.

He was blind and deaf to the crowd.

He secured the puck again, and ran, dribbling it, toward the academy goal.

As he lifted his head and swung his stick, thinking to lift the puck for goal, while the opposing players were rushing toward him, he caught sight of Snodgrass, who had advanced through the crowd right up to the field of play.

When he saw that gaunt, grizzled head and face, Jack's arm lost something of its strength and nerve.

The puck seemed to slide off his stick.

One of the academy boys secured it.

And the next moment another goal was added to the one already made by the academy team; and the match was tied.

Jack Lightfoot pulled himself together.

He stole a glance at Snodgrass' grizzled face.

Snodgrass was looking at him, but there was no anger in the old man's glance.

Indeed, it held something, Jack could not be sure what, that somewhat brought Jack's courage back.

"Confidence!" he whispered to himself. "Confidence! I must win this game, no matter what happens afterward. I mustn't think of myself, but of the team, and of the play. Confidence!"

He faced the puck with Kirtland again.

He saw that Kirtland was nervous.

The signal came, and they struggled for possession of the puck.

It was a rather awkward struggle, and reflected no credit on either, in the eyes of the onlookers.

Then Jack, pulling himself together, got the puck, and shot it to the right, fearing to try for goal at that distance.

The forwards came together, and there was a scrimmage.

"Confidence!" whispered Jack. "Whatever comes afterward, the play is the thing now!"

But he could not quite recover himself.

The puck was taken away from his men; and a second or two later, after some lively work, it was sent between the high-school goal posts.

The score was three to two in favor of the academy boys now, and the game was in its second half.

"Howling mackerels, that was poor work on the part of somebody!" cried Ned Skeen, hopping up and down in his nervous excitement.

Again the puck was in play.

It flew toward the high-school goal again, but Lafe Lampton stopped it.

"Confidence; that's the thing you must have now; you can win—you've got to win!"

Jack took the puck, and sent it sailing toward the opposite end of the field.

The cover point and cover tried to stop it, and failed.

But it did not get between the goal posts, for Brodie Strawn was there, vigilant and watchful.

The puck came back, struck at and sent on in a zig-zag.

It skipped to the middle of the cleared space, where another lively fight took place for its possession.

Suddenly Kirtland was declared "off-side," and the puck was taken back to the center of the field, where it was faced for a renewal of the game.

Then the game raged once more, with quick dashes and passes; and the crowd yelling in much excitement.

Again Jack Lightfoot drove the puck for goal; but it was stopped by Bat Arnold, the academy point.

In trying to send it back, Bat made a quick, nervous play, which skipped it from the field.

There was a little delay while the puck was brought on; then the fight for goal recommenced in hot earnest.

Once more Jack Lightfoot secured it.

His face was stern and grim now.

The time was passing, and the academy boys had one goal to the good.

"Now, drive it!" yelled Ned Skeen, who could not keep down the excitement that boiled for expression within him.

Jack Lightfoot was dribbling it.

"Drive it!" howled the spectators.

Jack saw his opportunity just then, and he drove it.

The opposing team failed to stop it; and it whizzed between the posts.

The match was tied—three to three.

Kirtland, who had made some "grand-stand" plays, for Kirtland liked at times to "play to the galleries," now saw that if his team won he would have to stop all spectacular performances and get down to real business.

These "grand-stand" plays and efforts, together with the "rattling" he had been given when Snodgrass came on the ice, he accounted to himself as the reasons why the score stood now three to three.

It nettled him to think of that score.

He had hardly believed, when he came upon the ice, that the high-school boys could get a single goal, and here it was a tie, and the game nearing its end.

"Get into gear, fellows!" he shouted. "Will we let these guys from the high school do us?"

He skated to the middle of the field, where the puck had been placed, and stood ready to face it with Jack Lightfoot.

"Kirtland," said Jack, as he put down his stick, "I've said we could defeat you, and here's where we do it!"

He was himself as cool again as the conditions permitted.

He had not forgotten the thousand dollars nor Snodgrass, but he remembered even more strongly the boy in the red coat whom he had seen hurrying off the ice with the package containing the money.

"Talk's cheap!" grunted Kirtland.

"Is it? It's not worth a thousand dollars, Kirt; but right here is where we're going to beat you!"

"Play!" came the word.

They moved for the puck.

Jack Lightfoot took it, and sent it along.

He tried to shoot a goal, but the puck was blocked.

It came back; and again near the center of the field the combat for its possession raged fiercely.

Out of the scrimmage he took it again.

Tom Lightfoot caught it cleverly from him with his stick, as Jack tried to pass it to his right.

It came back, after Tom had shot it along the ice and it had been blocked by Bob Brewster.

A scrimmage followed—a fierce fight for possession; then Jack had it again.,

He lost it; and Kirtland's stick sent it for goal.

It went between the goal posts!

"No goal!" shouted Jack Lightfoot. "He raised his stick above his shoulders!"

The point was well taken, and the decision was given accordingly.

The fight was on again.

Kirtland might have been ruled off the ice, if Jack had persisted and demanded that action.

But Jack Lightfoot was a generous fighter.

"You were excited, Kirt, and that's all right; only it wasn't a fair goal, and I had to protest it."

Kirtland was angry—so angry that he was boiling with rage.

Though he secured the puck, his anger caused him to lose it; and Jack Lightfoot, getting it, sent it flying between the goal posts.

The time was up, and the whistle blew.

The match between the academy and the high school hockey teams had been played—a fast, a furious, and at times a brilliant game; and the high-school boys had won.

Score—four to three.

The spectators were cheering wildly.

"Not much to brag of," said Lafe Lampton, calmly taking a bite from an apple which he had found somewhere in his clothing; "but, fellows, it was enough. We won!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT CAME AFTERWARD.

Kirtland was so furious over the loss of the game that he skated out beyond the circle of the cheering

crowd and seemed on the point of turning in from there toward the shore.

"Look out, there!" some one yelled at him.

In his anger he had forgotten the thin ice, until he felt it cracking under him and heard that shout.

He turned quickly to skate back out of danger.

Then the black ice yawned under him, and he felt himself plunged into the chilling water.

He caught his breath, gasped and went under.

Jack Lightfoot, who had been skating toward him, anxious to say a word to lessen the sting of defeat which he saw Kirtland felt so severely, was horrified when he saw that.

He did not stop, however; but, disregarding his own peril, skated toward the break in the ice.

Some of the other boys came skating after him, plunging along in mad excitement.

Jack reached the ice ahead of them, and threw himself down on the broken edge.

Kirtland's head bobbed into view, and then his shoulders.

The ice was cracked and breaking between Jack and the half-submerged captain of the academy team.

Kirtland was chilled and had lost his head, and was simply splashing the water and pawing the air.

Jack saw that he would go under again in another moment or two, when it would be a question if he came up again, so cold was the icy water and so benumbing.

He crawled out over the ice on his knees, moving quickly.

"Look alive there, fellows!" Jack shouted, "and form a line, a living rope."

He reached his hockey stick out to the unfortunate captain of the rival team.

"Courage there!" he shouted; "hold fast and we'll have you out in a jiffy!"

Phil Kirtland seized the hockey stick as a drowning man will grasp at a straw.

The boys had flung themselves down, and a living rope reached from Jack toward safety.

Under him the ice was cracking and breaking up into cakes.

But he hung to the hockey stick. The boys behind him pulled with all their might; and their strength being added to constantly by others who joined them,

both Jack Lightfoot and Phil Kirtland were pulled out of the dangerous hole, Kirtland being almost lifted bodily by Jack, who, dropping his stick when he could, caught him in his strong, young arms, and so assisted him.

Then there was cheering, such as had not been heard before, when the rescued and the rescuers were safe on the firm ice.

CHAPTER XIII.

FACING SNODGRASS.

Kirtland was taken home.

Snodgrass had disappeared before the accident.

Jack's friends still hung about, praising him, and talking of the accident and rescue, and of the game.

Jack was thinking of Snodgrass, whom he must now face, and he was wondering what Kirtland would do about the thousand-dollar package.

Kate Strawn came skating toward him.

"Jack," she cried, gayly, "you're the bravest boy in Cranford, and with the exception of my brother Brodie, you're the best hockey player, too."

"And that ain't no joke!" said Lafe Lampton, as Kate skated on in the midst of a crowd of girls.

"Yes, she said the truth that time, or a part of it," admitted Ned Skeen, "and it isn't often that you find a girl who is willing to speak even a part of the truth. If she'd only said you're the best player without any exception she'd have hit it."

"Jiminy Crickets, Skeeny, but you do like girls!" said Lampton.

"I hate 'em!" said Ned. "They—they make me think of—of birds!"

"What kind of birds?" asked Lafe, biting into his apple.

"Geese—silly, cackling geese!"

"Skeeny, I'm guessin' that your mother was a girl once!"

Ned Skeen seemed to have forgotten that.

Departing from his friends, Jack Lightfoot went home, changed his clothing, and then made his way toward the residence of Mr. Snodgrass.

The victory he and his team had achieved gave him small joy, as he walked on, thinking of what he should

say when he stood face to face with the old gentleman, whom he pictured as being in an angry mood.

"Well, I just can't pay the thousand dollars," was his conclusion. "That's simply impossible, for I haven't got it, and couldn't get it. I wonder if he'll believe what I say, and if he'll want to have Phil Kirtland taken in charge? He may want to have me arrested."

His courage almost failed as he reached the gate in front of Snodgrass' house.

Then he opened the gate and walked up to the door.

A maid answered his ring, and she conducted him to the library, saying that Mr. Snodgrass was waiting for him there.

This sounded ominous, and Jack fairly trembled as he followed her through the hall.

The banker was seated at his desk, and had been reading a book.

The walls of the room were covered with books in cases, and on the table there was a litter of papers.

Snodgrass wheeled round in his chair, and pushed his glasses up on his forehead, so that he seemed to be looking at Jack with two pairs of eyes.

The maid retreated, and Jack stood hesitating, a lump in his throat.

"I've been expecting you, Jack; so I left word with the servant that I'd be waiting for you. That was a brave thing you did—that rescue."

He motioned to a chair.

Jack sat down, holding his hat, and feeling troubled and confused.

"I—I told Mrs. Snodgrass about that—about the loss of the money!" Jack stammered, not knowing how to begin.

"Yes, and she told me; that's why I've been expecting you—I want to hear what you have to say about it."

"I took the package, and meant to bring it straight to Mrs. Snodgrass, and then——"

"My errand boy asked you for the package, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," Jack faltered.

Snodgrass removed his spectacles and slowly polished them with his handkerchief while he scanned Jack's face.

"And you didn't give it to him?"

"I didn't think I ought to; you were very particular, sir, to tell me that I must take it to Mrs. Snodgrass."

"Very true, Jack!"

Snodgrass' tone seemed to change.

"So I wouldn't give it to him; but intended to bring it myself."

"Very good, Jack; you did just right in that, though I'm sorry for what happened afterward. Now, I'll confess to you, that I sent the errand boy to try you, to see if you would do what I told you not to do."

Jack felt surprised.

"That's the principal reason why I gave you that package of money—to test your reliability. If you had given the package to the boy, after I instructed you not to, I should have been very much disappointed in you. But you were true to your trust; and what happened afterward, as I understand it, you were not to blame for. Anyone is likely to be knocked down and robbed."

A great load was rolled from Jack Lightfoot's heart. He saw that Snodgrass was not disposed to blame him severely for the loss of the money, and did not intend to demand its repayment or restoration.

"Now," said Snodgrass, rising, "we'll go up to Kirtland's and see what Phil Kirtland has to say about this. I've heard your story from my wife, and it's a queer one. I never looked on Phil as a thief, and we'll see how he explains this."

"He denied that he took it; yet I saw him!"

"Yes, yes, I understand that you think you saw him."

He got his hat, his coat and his cane; and he left the house with Jack Lightfoot and took his way to Kirtland's.

Phil Kirtland was in, of course; and sent word down that he was able to see them, in his room.

Phil was sitting in an easy-chair, and his dark face flushed when he saw Snodgrass before him.

"Lightfoot," he said, "I thank you for pulling me out of that hole."

He turned to Snodgrass.

"There's your money," he cried, and he held out a package.

It was not the package which had been taken from Jack Lightfoot, but it contained a thousand dollars, as

Kirtland showed by pulling out the bills and displaying them.

Snodgrass sat down, when invited to, and Jack did the same.

Snodgrass was painfully surprised.

"Then you did take the money?" he cried. "And I was ready to declare that you were incapable of doing anything of the kind."

Kirtland's dark face cleared.

"Thank you for that," he said, quietly. "I am quite incapable of doing anything of the kind, as Jack Lightfoot ought to have known from the first."

"But I saw——"

Kirtland waved his hand airily.

"Now, I have an explanation to make," he said, speaking to Snodgrass, "which I will make only on one condition."

Snodgrass was feeling in a good humor; he had recovered his money, and Kirtland had declared that he had not taken it.

"I'm ready to hear you, and I thank you for the money. I find it's all here; not the same bills, I think, but the thousand dollars is here."

"My one condition is, that both you and Jack Lightfoot shall say nothing at all of what has happened with regard to that money."

"Not even to my wife?"

"Oh, yes, to your wife, if you want to; and Jack may tell his mother, and any friends he has taken into his confidence. But the thing must stop there. Do you promise that?"

Snodgrass fumbled with the package.

"Go on!" he said, after a moment of hesitation.

"Then, I will confess to you, that a distant relative of mine took that money—knocked Jack down on the ice, just as Jack claimed, and got the package away from him."

Jack was ready to stare open-mouthed.

"That's the truth, and the whole truth," said Kirtland. "This relative, whom I will not name unless it's necessary, came here to visit me the day before the masquerade on the ice."

Jack gave a start.

He remembered that he had seen a young stranger on the street that day with Phil Kirtland.

"We thought it would be a lark, if we both went on the ice that night disguised and dressed just alike, and that's what we did. He took advantage of the disguise, and robbed Lightfoot. Of course Lightfoot came boiling right up here. I was stumped at first, and I was red hot; then I thought of this relative, who had worn a red coat just like mine. That cooled me down a little. I resolved to find out.

"I did find out. But I had to follow him to the town where he lives, which is not so very far from here; for he skipped out and left here that night. I cornered him, and made him confess. He had spent some of the money. I took my own money and put back the amount he had squandered. So, you have the story; and you have again the thousand dollars."

A long talk followed; and Jack, seeing how he had wronged Phil Kirtland in word and thought, begged his pardon most manfully.

"Jack," said Kirtland, as Lightfoot and Mr. Snodgrass turned to depart, "we'll let that go—by-gones should be by-gones, eh? But there's one thing that is a very live question. Your fellows defeated mine this afternoon. I was rattled, when Mr. Snodgrass came on the ice, and that's a fact; and that's the reason you and your crowd defeated us. But you can't do it again, not in any old game or sport you can scare up."

Jack turned to him, with a merry laugh in his gray-blue eyes.

He was feeling so light-hearted that he wanted to shout and laugh and sing, and even cry for joy.

"Kirtland," he said, speaking gayly, "I guess we can scare up something; and we'll try you, whenever and however you like."

THE END.

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